



ON OLD CAPE COD

By Ferdinand C. Lane

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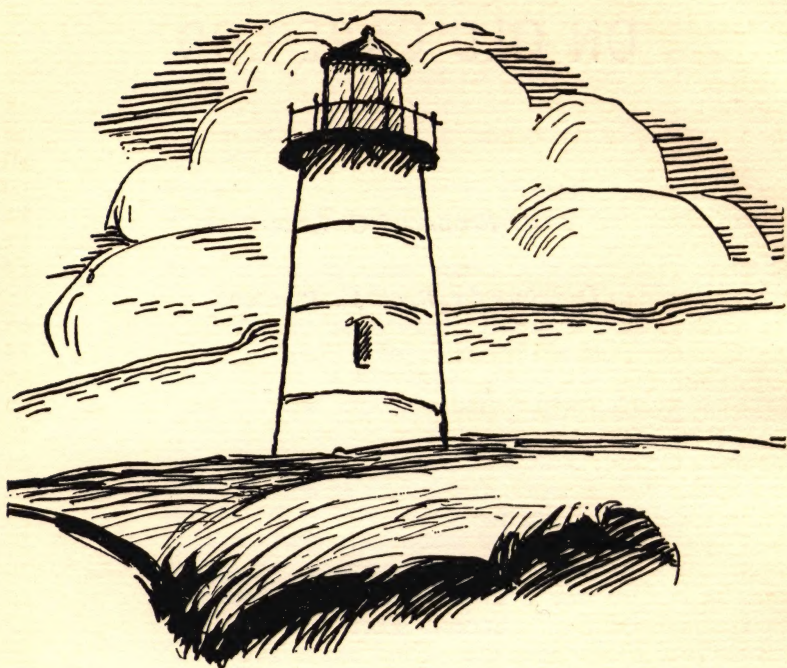
Drawings by Rena V. Rockwell

SECOND EDITION

To Emma - my Wife

Ferdinand C. Lane

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ON OLD CAPE COD

How rich is life on old Cape Cod
Where autumn smiles in golden rod,
And marshes flame, though not with fire -
A region blest of heart's desire.
In vain we'd roam the Seven Seas
There are no quainter shores than these.

Here nature in indulgent mood
Enfolds us with her solitude;
And here her cleansing winds combine
The tonic of the salt and pine,
The while old ocean's muffled swells
Are chiming like cathedral bells.

The days drift by without a care
As sweet fern odors scent the air,
And watching wheeling gulls at play
The world of strife seems far away.
It must have been a kindly God
Who shaped the sands of old Cape Cod.

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ON MONOMOY

Gigantic finger, joint by joint,
Thrust out in warning from the land
To lurking shoals, along your point
We tread a skeleton of sand,
Till at the end we seem to be
Where all the world dissolves in sea
On Monomoy.

O'er Stone Horse shoal and Pollock Rip
The sullen tides sweep on apace
Where many a gallant sailing ship
Has found her final resting place;
But of the dead - no man may say
Till redly dawns the judgment day
On Monomoy.

For fishermen tell ghastly tales
Of wrecks and shuddering moons that mark
Red murder done, and spectral hails
Of Yo-Hoes keening from the dark!
So in the night when breakers moan
Fear trails his steps who walks alone
On Monomoy.

Waif of the seas and old Cape Cod
Where Gosnold voyaged long ago,
Where bold Champlain in armor trod,
What tales the muttering undertow
Could Whisper - or the sea birds scream
To brooding dune and marsh adream
On Monomoy.

THE SONG OF THE SEA SHELL

Come press your coral lip against my ear
Frail vagrant of the sea,
And sing to me the songs I love to hear
From ocean's symphony.

Of tides that set in far off palmy isles
Where ukueles strum,
And star eyed maidens wreathed in flowers and smiles
Dance to your rhythmic hum.

No plaintive bird, full throated with the spring,
Warbles a sweeter note
Than those enchanting melodies that ring
Within your pearly throat.

Sonorous chords that sound a minor key,
Sea chanties hoarse and low,
The echoes of the mermaid's minstrelsy,
And songs the sirens know.

But now a bit of flotsam on the beach
Imprisoned in my hand,
I listen to the mysteries you teach
And strive to understand.

Your music leaves me in a brooding vein
Sweet chantress of the deep,
For in those elfin strains you wake again
From death's engulfing sleep

And when, like you, upon life's farthest shore
Time bears my empty shell,
O may such songs as your immortal store
Be mine as well!

WINDS OF THE CAPE

Winds of the Cape, go tearing by
Down the wild canyons of the sky!
When winter's cold has stripped the trees,
And fields are bare and waters freeze,
We hear them in the dead of night
Careering on their headlong flight -
The formless horsemen of the blast
In gales of darkness rushing past!

Winds of the Cape in gladness ring
With all the lilting songs of spring!
When fresh and clean the world awakes,
And petals fall in snowy flakes -
From beach plum bush and apple tree
There comes the haunting melody
From sky land's caravans once more -
Wild geese in flight for Labrador!

Winds of the Cape in Summer days
When shore and dune dissolve in haze,
Come drifting down the heavenly leas
From cloudland's floating Hebrides,
Caressing with your langorous calm,
And coolness like a healing balm;
And whispering tales of Araby
Palm fringing some enchanted sea.

Winds of the Cape, what sadness blends
In those wild gusts that Autumn sends
Down empty hallways of the sky,
To echo every mournfully
The footsteps of the dying year;
To grieve o'er woods and meadows sere
For things we loved so much - but lost
Like blossoms withered by the frost.

THE ENCHANTED MARSH

O ripples in the marshland grass
Like waves on an enchanted sea,
The winds, with trailing garments pass
Invisible adown the lea
Each footprint, evanescent, pressed
In shadowed highlight, trough and crest.

No spray upon those waves is seen
To splash upon the marshy bank;
Uncanny sea so strangely green!
While lurking in those coverts dank
What things of the abyss may dwell
Only the fear hushed winds might tell.

Far off where dunes aspiring melt
Into the sky, those currents flow
In turmoil neither heard nor felt
How furtively they come and go!
Things yet undreamed of well might be
Submerged beneath so weird a sea.

No surges break but in our ear
An elfin murmuring seems to sound,
So vague it is we scarce may hear.
O can it be the far off pound
Of foamless surf on sands unseen
Beyond that shimmering waste of green?

And we who sail that eerie sea
Go drifting on a tide of dreams
To unknown isles in fantasy,
Borne on the undulating beams
Of sun, dim litten, or the moon
That cringes o'er the farthest dune.

How timelessly it ebbs and flows,
That sea of ever changing light,
And whence it bears us no one knows
To what wild chasms of the night
Where fancy, yearning to explore
Pauses, aghast, upon the shore.

THE FRAGRANCE OF THE CAPE

The sun, that sovereign alchemist, and winds
That do his bidding, gleaned from the wilds
Sweet essences and savory condiments
Have mingled them in that vast crucible
Of hill and hollow, swamp and circling sea,
And like the witch's cauldrons, from that brew
Evoked a fragrance sweet as Araby.
The honeyed breath of Mayflowers in the spring,
The nectar lingering in the elfin cups
Of purple lilacs, fairy scents distilled
By pendant locust blossoms, essences
That lade the air when the wild roses bloom
In scarlet flames that beautify the hills;
The resinous aroma of the pines
In summer heats when crows call languidly
To droning bumble bees and gulls float past
Like wisps of snowy cloud; the musk of swamps
Where swaying cat tails shimmer in the sun
And the noon stillness echoes to the calls
Of blackbirds clarion shrill; the pungent smell
Of sage grass by the tidal pool, the spice
Of sweet fern from the hillsides redolent
With beachplum and the subtle frankincense
Of waxen bayberry, and over all
The faint, elusive permeating scent
Of sand and salt and spray from shore and sea.
The mace and cinnamon of far off isles
Are in that odor intimate and quaint
And lasting as the memories that cling
To weathered houses, gardens colorful
With hollyhocks and dahlias, rimmed with shells;
Or stranded hulls that brood in lonely coves
By crumbling piers where once proud vessels lay.
The romance and adventure of those days
When stanch descendants of the Pilgrim band
Carved out from sand and wilderness their homes
And wrung a hard subsistence from the deep,
Still linger in the memories of that time,
And in the perfume subtle, vague and strange
That charm elusive as the whispering breeze,
Sad as the setting sun athwart the dunes,
Mysterious as the ever changing sea,
The wild sweet, haunting fragrance of the Cape.

SEA LAVENDER

Upon the marsh a filmy blur
As delicate as gossamer;
A wraith of fog, a vaporous wisp
With stem and leaves and branches crisp,
Their fibre toughened by the gale,
Can plant so hardy seem so frail?

Half hidden mid its stalks of green
The flowerets are scarcely seen
As dainty specks of ocean's blue,
Or bits of sky that filtered through,
To melt in tints of amethyst
As evanescent as the mist.

And now through many a lacey line
That fairy fingers intertwine
Upon my mantelpiece at last
You shed the fragrance of the past;
A wraith of marshland witchery -
A floral memory of the sea.

THE FINAL ROSE

From an ember
bud that glows,
In September
flames a rose.

Bursting prison
doors of bark,
Blithely risen
like a lark.

Sweetly winging
to my room,
Ever singing
in perfume.

Tardy comer,
woodsprite blest,
Dying summer's
last and best!



FAIRY RINGS

Far and near on every hand
Fairy rings bedeck the sand,
Footprints of the sportive elves
Dancing gaily with themselves;
Hand in hand and round and round
Treading circles on the ground
Nightly, by the glow worm's ray
To the cricket's roundelay.

Ardently each woodland gnome
Clasps a fairy from the foam,
Waltzing till the wondering moon
Sees each circle as a rune
In a maze of mystery
For the puzzled stars to see,
While the revellers at dawn
Leave a myriad circles drawn.

Or perchance the compass grass
Whirled by wandering airs that pass
Has engraved those strange designs
In its circumscribed confines.
Archimedes never drew
Circles more exact or true
Than each needle pointed blade
Razor edged and green as jade.

FAIRY RINGS

Can we delve the cryptic sense
From each grooved circumference?
In the grass that etched those rings
What immortal spirit springs?
Or what inspirations stir
The bewitched geometer
To such elfin tracery
On the sands beside the sea?

BEACH PLUMS

How daintily your blossoms cling
Like memories of winter snows;
The maiden promises of spring
That Nature, wakening, bestows;
White as a bridal veil of gauze
O'er branches gnarled like eagle's claws.

How richly ripe and purple hued
You lure the eager appetite
When autumn yields in kindest mood
Those luscious globules of delight!
The sylvan elves must brew that taste
From sea and dune and scented waste.

For only skill like theirs could blend
From woodland wild and rolling brine
Such flavors. Or perchance they lend
Their elven powers to those divine
So that the tang of earth and sky
Is mingled in their alchemy.

Or were some darker rites invoked
Some ritual of the churchman's hell;
Malignant imps and beldams cloaked
In blackness capering 'neath the spell
Of gibbous moons obscure and lone -
Such witchcraft we might yet condone.

Yes, though we know not whence you came
Your sweet caresses to the tongue
Would still delight us just the same
Whether from day or darkness sprung;
Content and carefree, from the stems
To pluck such epicurean gems.

ON TRURO HILLS

Upon those dome like hills of sand
A wonderous carpet has been laid,
Rich as the rugs of Samarkand
And gorgeous as some rare brocade
Wrought on the looms of far Cathay
Or by the shrines of Mandalay.

It covers well those hills of sand
That glaciers rounded long ago,
Nor can the dyes of Samarkand
Display a stranger, deeper glow
Such tints of red and gray and green
With gold and amber in between.

To rolling slopes the lichens cling
And tufts of bunch grass russet sere,
Through them the murmurous breezes sing
While clustering sweet fern, far and near
Wafts spicy smells like incense o'er
Those lonely hills from wood to shore

The wild bearberry shyly twines
Its sinous length through grass and moss,
How glossy are its clinging vines
From green to rusty red. Across
Its sheen the sunbeams dreamily
Play like the waves upon the sea.

Blueberry clumps in curving lines
Mingle with waxen bayberry
To trace their arabesque designs
On richly wrought embroidery,
With borders in the marshy sedge
And fringing beach grass for the edge.

A treeless waste it seems, but no
The scrub oak, lichen crusted, cowers
And dwarf pines, gnarled and twisted, grow
By beach plum thickets, white with flowers
A waste that blooms with rarer dyes
Than jungles turn to tropic skies.

And there are thread bare patches too
That add more color to the heath

ON TRURO HILLS

For where the texture is worn through
It shows the golden sands beneath,
While in the afternoon's slant rays
All outlines blur in purple haze.

Uncanny moorland, desolate
And in the dusk how weirdly still,
A landscape one can ne'er forget.
O'er ghostly hollow wraithlike hill
What timid moonsprites nightly flee
The muttering demons of the sea!

The ebbing seasons merely change
That coverlet from day to day,
By shifting, in their varied range
From sober hues to some more gay,
While from the sea and sky and air
Fresh color splashes everywhere.

That turf rough seeded by the wind
And nurtured by the pensive sun,
Is richer than the shawls of Ind,
Or that famed carpet once begun
By Jinns and Peris, known of yore,
That through the air the Genii bore.

Perhaps on some enchanted breeze
From Kurdistan or Araby
Those Genii over unknown seas
Have borne this priceless tapestry,
This fabric wrought in Faery land
To beautify a barren strand.

'Tis woven on the loom of time
Spun from the filaments of dreams,
This magic carpet. Age nor clime
Can match its pattern, or the streams
Of color lavish Nature spills
O'er Truro's ancient, windswept hills

MY DRIFT WOOD FIRE

Heap high the wood on my rusty grate
As I sit enthroned like a potentate
In my old arm chair, while the crackling blaze
Unbars the gates, to my dazzled gaze,
Of a flame bright world that my fancy weaves
Though the storm may batter the creaking eaves.

There is Norway pine from the Arctic's chill
From wrecks that splintered off Peaked Hill;
There is stout oak fashioned by broad axe blows,
And stranger wood that the jungle grows;
For such is the tribute I levy, - these
Are the far flung gifts of the seven seas.

The surf that claws at the wind swept beach
Like skeleton fingers seems to reach
For my lonely shelter; but staunch it stands
Though its walls resound to the rattling sands
In volleys hurled by the howling blasts; -
Pile on those staves and that stump of mast!

Up the roaring chimney the black smoke goes
But O the glory that ebbs and flows
On the heat warped ceiling and buckled floor,
In green and purple; with ruddy ore
That glints in gold where the salt burns through
Mid flames that dance in an elfin blue!

My home may seem but a weathered shack
Where the cold creeps in through many a crack;
But my fire's bright magic has changed all these
To a castle hall where I take my ease,
With the window flaunting in sparkling lines
My royal crest that the frost designs.

Yes, I am a king carefree and bold
And I laugh at the gale and the winter's cold.
My grate? 'Tis a jewel vault of Ind.
That music wild? - It is not the wind
But my minstrel's songs, for my heart's desire
I have found at last in my drift wood fire!

THE SAND PIPER

Quaint manikin, what bids you keep
Such formal distance with your droll
Divertisements, the while I stroll
In solitude beside the deep?

Your mannerisms first suggest
A Puritan sedate and prim;
Then change you by capricious whim
Into a gnome with hooded crest,

Or bit of animated foam,
Or e'en a cloud wisp drifting by, -
What region in the sea or sky
Or lonely dune can you call home?

Your footsteps mincing gleefully
Thread in and out along the verge
Embroidering the creamy surge, -
Strange little old man of the sea!

But in your antic frolicking,
Your beak grotesque and solemn eye,
Your stilt-like legs, your piping cry,
And sudden ecstasies of wing,

There is a kinship with the spray
Wind driven, and the restless sand,
A mingling of the sea and land,
The hither and the far away.

Blithe atomy, bold Nature's child
Within you pulses glad and free
With joyous spontaniety
The tameless spirit of the wild!

THE WHISTLING BUOY OFF NAUSET

Voice of unutterable woe
Wailing alone at sea!
Borne on the shuddering winds that blow
Out of the dark to me.
Now far - now near
To the frightened ear
Comes that monody wild and free.
Mingled of menace and grief and fear
With a maniac chuckle of glee -
O hear!
That note of demoniac glee!

Prophet of peril and storm,
Harbinger, Triton and brute,
Mariners peering to glimpse your form
Cheer at your hoarse salute -
That gurgling sound
Of a sob half drowned
That is vague as the muttering foam!
Staggering drunkenly to and fro,
You buffet the tide ribs and undertow,
A fettered gnome
In the grip of the shoals below.

Hark to that ominous roar
Freezing the blood with dread!
Vampire waves on a spectral shore
Ravening over the dead.
O-oo, O-oo!
Is your wild adieu
To the souls that the winds have sped!
Breakers are howling like wolves on the trail,
Foaming and gnashing and leaping the rail,
Where a shrieking crew
Are lost in the maddened gale.

Wraith of the dangerous seas,
Haunting the skeleton sands,
Creature of iron and billow and breeze
Wrought by a mortal's hands.
Your eerie moan
So weird - so lone
Is a medley of boding and rapture and groan.
Roisterer, mourner and demon I wis
Strangest of beings in ocean's abyss
Your elfin cry
Is a note of its infinite mystery.

PEAKED HILL BARS

On the dread bars at Peaked Hill
The sullen waves are strangely still;
And o'er that eerie sand dune's crest
The winds, beguiling, seem at rest;
As the wild flare of Highland Light
Goes surging up into the night.

What sinister serenity
Pervades that graveyard of the sea,
Where sand bars, white as bone, submerge
Down where the tides intone a dirge
For houseless and unhallowed souls -
'Tis Death who broods among the shoals!

For hark, it comes, the thunderous gale
That makes those dunes and beaches quail,
As the wild winds and waves embroil
Those shoals until they seem to boil
And lift to heaven as loud a din
As though the fiends were caged within.

No mariners of old e'er sailed
More dangerous seas. Charybdis veiled
No starker terrors than those blue
And greenish shallows hide from view,
Where, crouched like tigers on the kill,
Lurk the dread bars at Peaked Hill!

THE RIME OF THE THREE CAPTAINS

Three captains lounged before the blaze
Of drift wood burning cheerily,
And they warmed to ventures of other days
In salty tales of the sea.

Tarred were the ropes coiled under the eaves,
Tar had dripped on the warping floor,
Beach sand fluttered like withered leaves
And sifted under the door.

The salt that crusted the chimney wide
Had tinged the flames with yellows and reds;
Salt were the wavelets that lapped outside,
And white as the salt were their heads.

Visions of many a tropic clime
In the firelight seemed to come and go;
Till friends they had known in their youthful prime
Took form in the radiant glow.

As time cracked voices droned away
Through strange adventures in days gone by,
One voyaged with them to far Cathay
And spice swept Araby.

Quaint were the islands they knew so well
Zanzibar, Pitcairn, and Celebes;
Isles enchanted where reigned the spell
Of other and lonelier seas.

Seas that cringed at the typhoon's wrath
When his thunderous roar was heard;
Silent seas in the calm of death
Where never a whisper stirred.

And the pulses quickened to hear their tales
Of voices hailing from spectral sands;
Of dead men's ships with their ghastly sails
Unfurled by skeleton hands!

Legends weird of an unplumbed deep
Where galleons foundered in days of yore;
And sightless monsters that grope and creep
In the slime of the ocean floor.

THE RIME OF THE THREE CAPTAINS

Sagas of shipwreck in days long gone,
Of pirate treasure and revelry,
Of clashing cutlass and fights hard won
In some blood stained mutiny.

On decks awash how they held their own
When faced by the knives of a cursing crew.
And they spoke of shoals and of ledges lone
Which only the sea birds knew.

Youth flushed once more on withered cheeks,
Bent shoulders squared defiantly,
At such deeds as fired the warlike Greeks
In their legended Odyssey.

And the murmuring tide ebbed once again,
And the fire burned low e're the captains three
Recalled with a sigh they were old, old men
Who were done with their toil on the sea.

STORM SIGNALS

Red blur against the western sky
A banner flutters threateningly
The sport of every treacherous air
It flaunts its warning note - "Beware"
Each wrinkle in its protean form
A portent of impending storm.

The darkening smudge where sank the sun
In bloody embers smoulders on
With brooding wrath. But angrier red
Invests that standard with the dread
Of unseen terrors. For it holds
Death's shadow in its writing folds!

NEPTUNES COURSERS

Horses of Neptune that bound and dash
Maddened with fear at the tempest's lash,
Pawing the sand with their thudding feet
In a crashing rhythm of thunderous beat,
Swift as the startled winds they race,
Straining ever at fleeter pace;
Forms that curve where the billows comb,
Breasting a welter of seething foam,
What unseen riders spur them on
In a fierce stampede to be up and gone?
Out of the hoary deep they come,
Surging on with a booming roar,
Pounding ever along the shore,
Till the senses whirl and the ear grows numb.

Manes that stream in the wind swept spume,
Necks that arch in the breakers' crest,
Hoofs resounding like drums of doom,
Rearing forward with frantic zest,
Wild are the steeds of the storm scarred deep!
Trident driven, they plunge and leap,
With nostrils spread and their eyes aglow,
And fetlocks gripped by the undertow,
Boisterous, raging, uncanny steeds
Out of an ocean waste that breeds
Chargers fit for a sea god's needs -
Neptune's coursers, untamed and free,
Fleeing the wrath of the unknown sea!

TO A SPIDER WEB WET WITH DEW

Suspended o'er the grass there floats a web
More delicate than strands of gossamer
Wet with the morning dew, in pendant gems
That flame with reds and greens and darting blues
From the bright sun. A filmy nothingness
Made visible by jeweled drops and etched,
Like frosted silver, on a background dark
Of drooping pines. An airy talisman
As lustrous as a diamond necklace draped
About a Peri's throat. What fleeting glimpse
Of loveliness ethereal and unreal
Inspired that rapt enchantment of design,
That harp of strings attuned to elfin songs,
That ladder for the moonsprites nightly trail
From sky to earth. What miracle of line,
What shimmering grace, what witchery of form!
So fragile that a fallen leaf may rend
Its warp of magic ne'er to know the woof
Of hard reality. A diagram
Of elfin tracery impalpable;
Each angle and its intersections squared
By that grotesque geometer who spins
Unseen, a hateful spider, ogre grim
To all the insect world. Can ugliness
So venomous create a thing so fair
Beyond the range of art? In pensive mood
We pause a moment to admire and scan
Its meaning. Can such fairy elegance
Spring from so foul a source? Yet legends tell
How crippled Vulcan, grimed with dust and smoke,
In darkness wrought the glorious shield of Mars.
The water lily, blossom honey sweet,
Draws nectar from the mire. Nor time nor bounds
May curb that hidden beauty that wells up
From secret springs in nooks obscure and dark,
Till gems of dew upon a spider's web
Glow like the Pleiades in frosted skies.



THE DUNES

The dunes, the silent sentinels of the land
That range along the lea,
In revery unbroken, there they stand
And gaze far out to sea

Across their wind swept crests the breezes play
In cadence sad and sweet,
The restless sands whip ever day by day
Their surf tormented feet.

The dying sunbeams gild their crags with gold
Then purple into night,
Around their slopes the elves of twilight fold
A film of spectral light.

A landscape wild that one might see in dreams
Or on the pallid moon,
Blue shadows traced in silver by her beams
In many a cryptic rune.

THE DUNES

Or etched against the winter sky they show
An outline weird and stark,
Their pale sands melting like the sparser snow
Into a background dark.

With scudding clouds, reflected on the dull
Gray mirror of the sea.
Cut by the wing points of a lonely gull
In poised expectancy.

The distant sand bars mark the skeletons
Of other vanished dunes,
Their crests were once upreared to other suns
And other ghostly moons.

The seething shoals once foamed beneath your feet
And maddened tide rips swirled
Whence risen proudly you can stand and greet
The older, firmer world.

Unstable element of shifting sand
Whose contours ever change,
But moulded by great nature's groping hand
In shapes bizarre and strange.

We too, from sand have fashioned castled towers
For waves to wash away,
But her creations crumble much like ours
Though in a grander way.

Nature, like man, forever vainly strives
To conquer time and tide;
She toils long aeons, we our briefer lives
And both unsatisfied!

THE FLIGHT OF THE WILD GESE

Out of the sky they call to me
Honking geese in the far flung V
Of an angle traced on the filmy skies
As they float along, and their plaintive cries
Are the pipes of an elfin roundelay.
Tis the call of the wild to the Far-away!

"Northward Ho!" is their haunting chant
Down the rocking winds their long lines slant,
And the old gray gander who takes command
How he marshals the files of his climbing band,
As they wing their flight with a tireless haste,
To the ice rimmed seas and the tundra waste.

To the spruce fringed lakes and the virgin sod
Where never the foot of man has trod;
To the empty lands unspoiled and clean
That never the eye of man has seen;
Where the frost wraiths flee in the melting nights
That throb to the dance of the northern lights.

On their venturous voyage no compass guides
Through the murmuring reefs and the chartless tides
Of the upper air. But their leader hoarse,
Like a pilot sage directs their course
To the sheltered fens and the coves they share
With the snow white fox and the arctic hare.

How we follow the wild geese's homing flight
Till their chorus dies and they fade from sight,
And our pulses thrill to be up and away
Joyously buoyant, as free as they.
For their far off challenge seems to ring
"Awake, glad world, to the songs of Spring!"

SWEET FERN

Strange perfume of the wilderness,
Elusive as an elfin child
That broods above the landscape wild -
And haunting as a last caress.

From thickets broken and obscure
That spicy fragrance down the lea,
Brings to the ever murmuring sea
The sweetness of the barren moor.

Low risen thickets, scarcely seen
Among the clumps of reindeer moss;
What elfin traceries emboss
Your leafy arabesques of green!

And if no lonely passer by
Has trod your solitude to share
That incense - every wandering air
Has borne it to the bending sky.

WHITE SAIL

White sail beyond yon point of sand
Set like a gem upon the blue,
A fairy bark for elfin land
Receding gradually from view;

White sail a snow flake come to rest
Like thistledown, upon the sea;
A distant beacon on the breast
Of watery immensity.

White sail, a finger tip that seems
To beckon from the ocean's rim,
To some enchanted isle of dreams
Beyond the skyline, vague and dim.

White sail that like a lonely tern
Fades out against the dying day,
We watch till you are gone and yearn
To voyage into the far away.

THE HUMMING BIRD

Blithe wanderer from some happier sphere
What hither darting brought you here
 Swift as a flash of light,
With rainbow spatters on your throat
Aflutter like a dancing mote
 Upon a sunbeam bright.

Bold atom of exultant life
With energy and action rife
 And pinions all ablurr,
What glad exuberance of wing
Like harping on a fairy string
 Evokes that vibrant whirr?

With humming, strumming melody
Like some supernal bumble bee
 You flit about to sup
On honey dew. Your fearless beak
Probes, lancet like, those sweets to seek
 Within each nectared cup.

Ah birdikin, now here, now there,
Poised elfinlike, upon the air
 Aglimmer like the dawn,
How ardently we would beguile
So fair a sprite to rest a while
 But flash! and you are gone.

Yet the sunspoken word you bring
Still lingers. Time is on the wing
 And never may be stayed.
So let us sip each honeyed hour
For life itself is but a flower
 That all too soon will fade.

O ROAD THAT WINDS AMONG THE HILLS

O road that winds among the hills
With sinuous curves that lure the eye
Up distant slopes to meet the sky,
And wake a wanderlust that thrills
To scenes which beckon far beyond
From steep Kashmir or Trebizon.

How like a bird, we'd love to roam
Beyond the gray Horizon's rim
That shuts us like a prison grim
Within that narrow niche - our home
While thoughts unfettered steal away
To Istanbul and far Cathay.

O road we tread in toil and strife
That climbs to greet the bending air,
The long, long trail to none knows where -
The weary highway we call Life -
What lies beyond? Ah, who can say
But we shall see and know - some day!

THE BEACH GRASS THRENODY

Lo in the wind the beach grass sings
A medley of fantastic things
That stirs the silence of the ear
With elfin notes we scarce may hear,
From formless shapes grotesque and strange
That lurk beyond the vision's range.

The fingers of what moon beam sprite,
Or lonely demon of the night,
Have strummed those sweetly plaintive strings
To the weird melody that wrings
A note of haunting mystery
From the chill vastness of the sea.

TO A ROSE JAR

Fair chalice in your spicy store
The roses seem to blow
And childhood's simple faith restore
In legend's long ago;
Such as the Arab's jewelled prose
Where Genii from the bottle rose
The magician's command obeyed
And at his feet whole kingdoms laid.

From odorous depths I summon thee
O spirit of the past!
Weave all your spells of fantasy
And may your visions last.
Bring to my ear the murmuring breeze
The drowsy, far off hum of bees,
Unfolding to my raptured gaze
Those scenes beloved, of olden days.

Once more within this scented gloom
Forgotten sunbeams rest
On hedges drooped with odorous bloom
By blushing lips caressed.
Those roses faded with the dusk -
Her lips grew cold, but fixed in musk
The fragrance lingers - and her eyes
Do they smile down from Paradise?

Prophetic incense, subtly rare,
O may I understand
The poignant messages you bear
From Memory's holy land
For petals torn from withered stems
Have filled this treasure casque with gems
And their sweet perfume brings to me
A hint of immortality.

BLUE BERRIES

From elfland's glades and coverts green
Peering through bars of sun and shade
Are friendly little eyes, I ween,
That glow like sapphires set in jade,
And shyly veil their azure spheres
In summer's filmiest atmospheres.

There banqueting, we half recline
And sip the perfume redolent
With sweet fern, aromatic pine,
And bayberries' seductive scent,
An incense rare as smoking spice
That censers raise to Paradise.

The stillness brooding like a pall
O'er thickets and entangled trees
Is stabbed by the shrill blackbird's call,
And rippled by the wandering breeze
That trails a buzzing dragon fly
Where bumble bees hum drowsily.

Athwart the slant rays of the sun
Far off there glides a cloudland sail
To faery shores. Our task is done -
Our treasure won - a brimming pail.
And no blithe argonaut e'er bore
From legend's quest a richer store!

THE WATCHER

A frail old lady bent and gray
She gazes out into the west.
To her it seems but yesterday
He sailed away with eager zest
"I pinned a rose upon his coat"
She falters, clutching at her throat.

A mariner he put to sea,
Twas more than fifty years ago,
The neighbors nod in sympathy,
She cannot understand they know.
What fancies throng her poor old head
"My Robert lost? He can't be dead."

And she is right. Her clearer eye
Sees through the storms and stress of years,
Full well she knows he did not die
The rainbow glistens through her tears
Enshrined within her heart in truth

Her Robert lives in deathless youth.
From her lone window on the shore
She nightly sets a lamp to burn
A beacon when the breakers roar
To guide him on his safe return.
No matter what the neighbors say
These two shall meet again some day!

THE SEA SHELL BOAT

How now, little maid, in your bonnet arrayed
With that quaint little shell in your hand!
Not a shell but a boat? Ah, I see, let it float
Far away from these mountains of sand.

It will sail so I'm told, down the pathway of gold
Where the sun paves the sea with its beams,
To some fortunate isle where the skies ever smile
Upon childhood's endeavors and dreams.

But, Honey, don't cry if it sinks bye and bye
Like a fluttering bird to its nest;
For the wild waves at play in their blundering way,
Like the oncoming years never rest.

My hopes were aglow in the long, long ago
When my own little ship left the shore;
But my hair has grown grey since it drifted away
And it never came back any more!



FLOTSAM

O flotsam stranded on the beach
Half buried in the oozing sand,
A sudden step, an outstretched hand,
And you are snatched beyond the reach
Of clutching waves. What brought you here
From far off climes beyond the seas,
The sport of every furtive breeze,
A wanderer for many a year?

What gulfs of ocean's nether world
Your paths have plumbed, I cannot know,
To what abyss the Krakens go,
Or where Leviathan was hurled.
What current dark, I wonder, links
Your lot with mine on this lone shore, -
But there is only silence more
Unbroken than the Memphian spinx.

And am I fain to speculate
Upon the burden of your past?
When I, myself, am flotsam cast
Ashore a little while to wait
For Time's resisless tides that sweep
In endless waves of night and day
Across the shoaling milky way
From some vast, unimagined deep!

THE ANCIENT LOG BOOK

'Tis a time eaten volume with pages so blurred
That they seem to peer out through a fog,
But our fancy illumines each lustreless word
Of that battered old "wind-jammer's" log.

Till our eyes gazing out through those angular lines
Like windows, transparent, behold
Far vistas of seas where adventure combines
With "spices" and "teak wood" and "gold."

"Off the Horn" where the "greybeards" loomed up "mountain high"
All "our topsails were carried away";
Then 'twas "cutlass and pike" when the 'pirates drew nigh"
As "becalmed off Macassar we lay."

"One man hurt" then a later notation, "he's dead"
And "was buried at sea" all we know,
He "signed from Tahiti" a "good man" they said,
"The fo'castle hands called him 'Joe'".

Lone wanderer far from his native lagoon
Was he mourned by some garlanded maid?
We ponder till jarred by a "roaring Typhoon"
And "there on our beam ends we laid".

"With our water casks low" when our "Bread had give out"
"We fetched by some island unknown"
Though we "dragged on the coral" while "Going about"
We added "their stores" to our own.

There's the wash and the surge of the murmurous deep
In each billowing flourish of ink.
Though the captains are silent in fathomless sleep
What they tersely inscribed is a link.

With a past, when our banner, its glory aflame
To the winds of the heavens was flung;
And their deeds are forever an epic of fame
Such as Homer of old might have sung.

THE DANCE OF THE MOON BEAMS

O the moonbeams dance down the broad expanse
Of a path o'er the heaving sea,
And they blithely trip from tip to tip
Of the billows ranging free.

Down a highway bright of silvery light
They dance to the ghostly moon,
In the sprightly set of a minuet
And the whirl of a rigadoun.

To our lonely shore like a burnished floor
Streams that river of luminous sheen;
'Tis a fairy track through the shadows black
'Tis a bridge that spans between.

The regions here and that unseen sphere
Far off in the western sky,
Where the day is done with the setting sun
And the sunsets fade and die.

Where the moon holds court and her minions sport
As over the seas they roam,
And they dance their way through the glistening spray
And laugh in the rippling foam.

"O the night is ours and its witching powers
"And there's never an eye to mark,
"For the demons sleep in the caverned deep
"And the goblins of the dark.

"Are far away where the shadows gray
"On the spectral sand dunes lie,
"So join in our mirth that is not of the earth
"But more of the sea and the sky!"

To the rhythmic beat of their twinkling feet
The creaming breakers fret,
As to and fro on a rollicking toe
They gracefully pirouette.

For the surges roll o'er the murmuring shoal
Through a brooding harmony
And the night wind sings of unspoken things
In an eerie melody.

THE DANCE OF THE MOONBEAMS

"O cast your cares on the buoyant airs
"Where the star points smoulder dim"
Is their lilting song as they float along
To the skyline's molten rim.

As their footsteps pave o'er the frosted wave
A path to the magic west,
With a carefree shout we would join the rout
And follow their homing quest.

But our feet are banned from that faery land
Though our vaulting fancy yearns
As it throbs in tune to the dying moon
Till the morning redly burns.

With our hearts in tune to the dying moon
We stand in the hush of dawn;
There are cryptic runes on the windswept dunes
But that luminous path has gone.

And the wet sands lie neath the empty sky
As drear as the lifeless sea,
But through our dreams flit the elfin beams
Of that moonsprite revelry.

MARSHES OF SANDWICH

Marshes of Sandwich where slow currents wind
Languidly seeking the outermost sea
Drifting, some ultimate haven to find,
Where far horizons stretch, boundless and free!

Out there beyond the white sea wall of dunes,
Murmurs of ocean that breathe faint and low
Looming like mountain peaks crusted with snow
Weaving blue shadows through hot afternoons.

Languorous meadows where dragon flies dream,
Level green solitudes soothing the eye,
Golden with mist from the sun's slanting beam
Purpled by patches of cloud floating by.

Prairies beloved of the homing wild geese
Nature's hurt children are healed by your balm;
How we have longed for the infinite peace
Born of your timeless, unchangeable calm!

THE SMILE OF THE SEA

O the sun's molten gold seems to spatter and spill
O'er the wavelets so dazzlingly bright,
As they dance to the songs of the sandpiper's shrill
With their numberless sparkles of light.

For the languorous winds with their deft fingers press
Those wrinkles of sapphire and flame,
And the fires they enkindle all surge to express
A shout of exultant acclaim.

How they twinkle and glitter like sparks from the steel
While the gilded foam chuckles with glee,
Till all nature, attuned to the rapture they feel
Seems aglow with the smile of the sea.



OUR CAPE COD HOME

O ancient Cape Cod house whose drooping eaves
Prim as the bonnet of a Pilgrim maid
Are sere and grey as Autumn's driven leaves,
What comfort seems to drowse beneath their shade
Comfort that fairly drips like Heaven's own dew -
The tranquil calm that our forefathers knew.

How many gales about those eaves have roared,
How many summer heats have come and gone,
And left their imprint on each weathered board
Time seasoned and discolored, handed on
To younger generations. Quaint and queer
You seem, but O your wealth of homey cheer!

Your architects were of a sombre breed,
Their doctrines gnarled and knotty to the core,
And yet you gave them refuge, 'twas their need;
What battlemented towers had yielded more?
A treasure galleon, in your roomy hold
Were sanctuary from the storm and cold.

OUR CAPE COD HOME

And beauty thrall'd them too, those builders dour,
Though beauty was to them, sedate and plain;
They wrought in harmony with marsh and moor
In simple lines, and time's enduring stain
On crumbling shingles, where the lichens grow
To mingle with the greys their golden glow.

With broad axe and with adze those builders wrought
And in the wilderness foundations laid
For our great nation. Liberty they sought
With toil and thrift - sound virtues roughly made
Of homespun stuff, quite like the clothes they wore
As out of fashion as your buckled floor!

The times were hard, the men who lived them rude,
They lacked the many luxuries we know;
The life within your walls was drab and crude,
At least our demagogues have told us so;
And yet along your pathway rimmed with flowers
How shallow flows this flippant life of ours!

The new apartment in the city's maze
Has fixtures that your age had never seen,
Machine made gadgets, till our very days
Seem spun for us, upon a vast machine;
And we ourselves an inconspicuous part
Of some grim Frankenstein without a heart.

Caught in the maelstrom of the times we strive
To please our gods of gold with feet of clay;
Exchange your solace for a noisy hive;
Clutch at the shell and throw the pearl away;
And your unbounded views of ocean's foam
Shut out with walls that never can be home.

O quaint old Cape Cod house, precarious link
Between the past and present, Life, no doubt,
Means progress, - so at least we're taught to think
Though often wonder what 'tis all about -
But as we smile at customs you have known
How are the angels saddened at our own!

THUNDER STORM OFF RACE POINT

Beyond the dunes what monstrous shapes are these
Like Titans rearing out of the abyss
To menace heaven? Terrible they loom
Upheaving with their shoulders till the sky
Is warped and yielding, and the trampled sea
Pales into death white foam. Impending doom
Sweeps to engulf the world, when flash on flash,
As far heat lightnings glint on burnished arms,
The wild Valkyries come! Their jet black steeds
Outpace the furious winds; and hark, the stroke
Of Thor, the Thunder God! His hammer dread
Splinters the silence, crashing downward, stuns
The firmament. That glare that blinds the eye
Is Woden's Sword! It pierces coil on coil
Night's writing dragon, pouring forth its flood
Of venomed gloom.

Redoubled is the din
The powers of Tartarus and Heaven locked,
In mortal strife. The adamant base
Foundationing the everlasting hills,
And the resounding archways of the sky,
Reverberate and tremble!

Wildly burst
Like pent up tears, the rains that hurtle down
Sodden with chill; while whimpering, the surge
All tempest frayed and besomed, choked with sobs,
Fingers the whining sands.

Ages it seems,
Tumultuous aeons, e'er the torrents cease
And tides of blackness ebb. Far out to sea
The mighty conflict drifts, the thunders die
As scorpion whips of forked lightnings scourge
The cringing giants of the cloud that flee
Down to their dungeons in the vasty deep;
While o'er their tatters rides the full orb'd moon
Glorious, resplendent like the shield of Mars,
Triumphant o'er the terrors of the storm.

TO A SCRIMSHAWED WHALE'S TOOTH

Quaint relic that the mellowing years
Have tinged with Autumn's ripened gold,
What scene of olden time veneers
Your ivory surface smooth and cold!
Hard bitten by some huge sperm whale
You often gored the giant squid,
That nightmare of the deep, amid
Unfathomed gulfs of crag and vale.

Remotest seas, their bounds unknown,
That old bull whale was wont to cross
By ways uncharted, he alone,
Shared with the wandering albatross.
Marauder savage and morose,
He spurned the waves in pride and wrath,
No killer dared dispute the path
The monarch of the ocean chose.

Then came the Waler's crew - and this
Lone carved fragment now remains
Of all his bulk, that the abyss
Long since engulfed. Yet it explains
A graphic story. Clothed with life
Its dead white surface - line by line -
Unfolds in intricate design
A sailor's dreams - etched by his knife.

Through many an hour of summer haze
While the long swells rocked languidly
His patient fingers graved that maze
Of intertwining tracery.
And that sweet face with hair so trim,
Love's arrow, and two hearts that bleed,
What touching romance we may read
In "H to J" - to Her from Him.

Old Time united them we trust -
Initials linked but separate -
Though both long mingled with the dust
Their story we may still translate
From this rude sketch. Devotedly
They passed a lifetime richly blest
And safe at home, together rest
In sad, sweet graves beside the sea.

TO A SCRIMSHAWED WHALE'S TOOTH

Or did perchance, Fate intervene
To bow that head in sorrow low
For lover lost - what came between
Those twain we cannot hope to know.
The sadness of a far off day
The fading of a golden dream
Dim memories, how fresh they seem
To ever youthful H and J!

Enshrined as on a magic page
A clasp knife for his only aid,
Still fondly lingers age by age
The love a sailor bore a maid.
His name, nor hers, no one can say,
No evidence besides, endures,
But silent eloquence like yours
Immortalizes H and J!

THE CREEPING FOG

Rolling in from the sea, rolling on
Ghostly floods chill as death, in the dawn
Swallow up all the world in their sweep
As the grey currents stealthily creep
Over marshland and dune, while the sun
Dripping mist, scarce proclaims day begun
To a landscape all eerie and wan
Drowned in fog, rolling in, rolling on!

Trees by oceans of droplets bedimmed
Loom like shapes that our fancy has limned;
Beacons set where the weird torrents range
Through invisible channels and change
All the loved, olden landmarks we know,
Till dissolved in that strange overflow
Earth and sky seem to blend and begin
In the fog's swelling tide, rolling in!

WOODEN SAILOR

Wooden sailor swinging war clubs
On my lawn with furious tempo,
Like the Don of Spanish legend
He of old, who braved the windmills
Looming up like giants, charged them
Splintering his lance and bruising
His frail bones on mad illusions;
You resemble him - bold warrior,
Struggling with the summer breezes,
Lunging at the clouds above you.

But your ludicrous gyrations
In my yard, your droll gymnastics
Point a world of deeper meaning,
For we too, are often harried
By imaginary perils;
Spend the years in aimless striving
Wearying the heart and sinews
On fantastic undertakings;
Cursed by impotent endeavor
Unproductive, never-ending.

If we smile at your contortions
Toiling furiously for - nothing .
It is less in mirth than sadness.
For I fear we fail to equal
Your stout heart and resolution
Wigwagging your bold defiance.
Yes, while we are battling shadows,
Wasting life in futile effort,
Can we wonder that the angels
Grieve in Heaven at our folly?

THE DREAMER

He lounges on the wharf and whittles pegs
While his pathetic gaze drifts out to sea,
Around him fishnets, anchors, empty kegs
And coils of rope are stored. His revery
Though deep, is sometimes broken by a sigh
As strange lights kindle in his faded eye.

A shapeless hat seems floating on his hair
Of wavy white. His clothes are patched and worn
His fingers palsy shaken, and an air
Of pathos and of helplessness forlorn
Enfolds him, as he lays his pipe aside
And gazes sadly at the ebbing tide.

His vision seems athirst to drink its fill
Of ocean's mystery that he loves so well,
For he has lived adventure, lives it still,
Though age, long since, has yielded to the spell
Of brooding calm. No idle dreamer he,
His thoughts are busied on some far off sea.

Stern old Magellan and Sir Francis Drake
Heard tales from just such ancient sailor men,
Tales that inspired a zeal to undertake
Those stirring voyages beyond the ken
Of their small world. Discoverers bold, - and yet
They steered the course some unknown dreamer set!

THE CHANT OF THE NIGHT WIND

O the wind in the chimney place thrums a wild strain
A chant that no mortal has known,
And my soul deeply stirs at its eerie refrain
In my dim lighted chamber, - alone.

For strange lifting cadences mark its sweet song
With gladness and beauty and fear,
Till chords, long forgotten, in memory throng
Like a shell that I press to my ear.

O where have you wandered, melodious breeze
That sounds such a magical note,
Have you winged on your journey, o'er limitless seas
From some Ultima Thule remote?

A region no mortal may ever explore
Whose legended boundaries lie
On foam whitened beaches and sinister shore
And crags that are gnashing the sky!

Where ice fields aglow in the dark of the moon
Reflect the volcano's red glare -
We may ponder and doubt - but our souls are in tune
To the verve of that uncanny air!

For the spirits of night strum their wild elfin lyres
And they harp on invisible strings,
While a music, unearthly, floats down from those wires
Like the tremulous flutter of wings.

For those notes so elusive, so mystically sweet,
We may sense but their vague undertone,
For they baffle our hearing, so faintly they beat
On the verge of the audible zone.

O restless and fitful, those wandering airs,
As the sad breezes sigh to the rain,
Then dying, evasively mock at our prayers,
For silent, we hear them again!

'Tis the music of elfland that rings in our ears
With its haunting notes witching and low,
Likes the voices of friends that have gone with the years
Or the echoes of songs long ago.

MIDNIGHT

In the dead watches of the night
As time drifts by on endless flight,
Drowsing upon our couch we hear
A distant clock sound faint but clear,
And chiming from its lonely tower
Ring out the solemn midnight hour.

That warning stirs the unquiet air
A golden day has flown - but where?
Another burns to greet the dawn
But one day has forever gone -
And pendulum and iron tongue
Their mournful requiem have sung.

Aghast the present moment flies
Midway between eternities,
As, winging on without a stay
Tomorrow flees from yesterday,
And vanished moments that have been
Will never come to us again!

THE GOLDEN ROD

What dazzling shape is this that seems to rise
At the command
Of some magician, till it glorifies
The barren sand?

A stately canopy for some proud elve!
And that rich sheen
The grand creation of the gnomes that delve
Grotesque, unseen,

In caverns dim. There while the forges ring
To blow on blow
Those humble artisans are burnishing
That wondrous glow!

How gorgeously the molten yellow gleams
As they combine
The sand's bright ore with sunlight's minted beams
In rare design.

Until the wealth that jade green leaves disguise
And buds enfold!
Wells upward with resplendent ecstasies
In jets of gold!

Fountains that o'er the sterile desert play
Erect and tall
With pendent droplets from their golden spray
That never fall.

Oases of enchantment where the bees
And beetles come,
To mingle with the murmur of the seas
Their drowsy hum.

Such splendor glitters in each regal nod
Of gilded bloom
We pause in doubt; is this the golden rod,
Or seraph's plume?

A scepter, or perchance a magic wand
For elfin kings?
Our fancy pictures in each jewelled frond
Fantastic things.

And still our wonder grows, and a vague fear
Of regions banned
Steals o'er us - lest our footsteps draw too near
To fairyland!

WILD ROSES

Whence comes that swooning fragrance on the air
That riot of rich color on the hill
Like smouldering embers? red, deep red, and fair
They are, beyond our groping words. We thrill
To inner surgings of unuttered things
When we behold, strewn o'er this alien lea
Exotic bloom that to our spirit sings
In perfume sweet as lifting melody,
Fresh from immortal Eden's radiant bowers
Where angels coveted our earthly flowers.

Like elfin torches tipped with odorous fire
Raining their ashen petals on the grass,
These flowering censers rouse a wild desire
For beauty yet unseen, in those who pass
This solitary way. O incense sweet!
The bees are drunken with it, the wild bees
And dragon flies that hunt this still retreat
Far from the world of men. Is it for these
That Nature lavishes her perfume rare
To scent this moorland waste and wandering air?

Wild roses, O but they were meant to be
More than the sweet companions of an hour;
Theirs is a loftier role, their destiny
In this sad world, to glorify the power
Of beauty welling up beyond the range
Of mortal view. Strange ecstasies concealed
Aforetime from our blighting frost and change
Aurora's swinging gates have here revealed;
Such perfect beauty as the seraph knows
Hid in that floral miracle - a rose.

THE COAST GUARD STATION

Stout fortress on the battle line
Of shrieking winds and thunderous surge,
A barbican against the brine,
A challenge to the breakers' dirge;
Not all the wild Atlantic's wrath
Can bar your men from life boats frail,
Nor all the fury of the gale
Can swerve them from their destined path!

The churning foam may pelt and freeze,
The stinging sleet cut to the bone,
They venture forth on perilous seas,
They venture forth, unsung, alone.
Like knights of olden time arrayed
In oilskin armor, theirs the role
To battle with the raging shoal
And beard the tempest unafraid!

No martial strains ring in their ears,
No banners blaze their desperate way;
Only a wife or mother peers
From distant sand dunes through the spray.
And yet no crown that fame may give
Can e're transcend the solemn pride
Of men, whatever may betide,
Who risk their lives that men may live.

KEEPER OF THE LIGHT

Aloft within the beacon tower alone
She trims the lamps that send their luminous beams
Far out into the night. The eerie moan
Of the wild shoal is smothered by the screams
Of winds that make the thrumming walls resound
With deafening din. She listens, mute with dread,
To voices mingling vaguely in the sound
Of the storm maddened waves, and shakes her head.
"Is it the waves?" she mutters. Bent and old
Her fingers tremble so, - but not from cold!

Her husband tosses on his cot below
Burning with fever, often calls her name.
But she must stand his watch though none may know
Of her long vigil. Vestal of a flame
Whose warning beams guide mariners aright
Mid perilous reefs, through all engulfing gloom
Though unclean spirits rage throughout the night
Riding the furious winds in rain and spume,
No matter if she shivers and turns pale,
Her courage, like her light, endures the gale.

But what drives hard like spray against the glass
Hurtling from out the dark? a tiny form
With battered wings, a tern which flees, alas,
Like some lost soul from the pursuing storm
Dashed to the rocks below. "Dear God!" she cries
"Why must my light that points great ships the way
"Be blooded by his piteous sacrifice?
"Life saving beams, who gave them power to slay?
"How hopelessly must good and evil blend
"When harmless birds meet such a cruel end."

ON CHATHAM BARS

On Chatham bars the surges moan
And sea birds cry;
A gull goes winging stark and lone
Across the sky;
While on the shore, with menace low,
Mutters the seething undertow.

O'er Chatham bars a frightened cloud
Goes driven fast;
The shoals are answering hoarse and loud
The roaring blast,
And joining that wild revelry
Of frenzied winds and raging sea.

Through blinding sands with bended head
The coast guard goes
By Chatham bars, in silent dread
For well he knows,
That surf may leave, on its retreat,
Some ghastly trophy at his feet!

On Easter morn the mourners stand
On Chatham hill,
To chant again His high command,
Of - "Peace be still!"
And scatter flowers upon the wave
To drift above some nameless grave.

For Chatham bars are silent now
On Easter Day,
Before that solemn group who bow
Their heads and pray
To Him, the Risen One, Who said,
"Then shall the sea give up its dead."

THE OLD TIMER'S LAMENT

O where is the Cape that I used to know
In the quaint old days of the long ago?
The weathered house with its friendly smoke
From the looming background of silver oak;
And the huge brick oven that flanked the grate
Where the fireplace yawned like the flaming gate
Of a fairy world to my childish gaze
While the russets sputtered before the blaze -
Was there ever such comfort and homey cheer
As the Cape that my memory holds so dear?

There were braided rugs on the sanded floor
And that queer round cellar - what bounteous store
Of pickle and relish and sweet preserve
Seemed overflowing each ample curve!
What jars of berries and stewed beach plum
And jugs - half hidden - of cherry rum -
And jugs that frothed with potato yeast,
And the dainties saved for Thanksgiving's feast
I think of them often and sigh - "Heigh-ho"
O where is the Cape that I used to know?

And that open chamber and corded bed
Where I listened to pattering rain overhead.
Rope handled sea chests and leathern trunks
And models of clippers and Chinese junks,
And apples drying in clustered strings
With numberless other wonderful things.
No cave from the storied Arabian Nights
Was filled with more treasures and marvelous sights
Than our storehouse under the eaves could show -
O where is the Cape that I used to know?

And the fragrant gardens that memory links
With the olden days - O those sweet Cape pinks,
And the hollyhocks and the columbine,
And the savory herbs by the ivy vine,
With the fish nets drying along the slope
Mid tangles of buoys and fresh tarred rope -
Yes the modern gardens are trim and neat
But I often think - "Do they smell as sweet
"As those beds where the roses loved to grow?"
O where is the Cape that I used to know?

THE OLD TIMER'S LAMENT

The captains turned from the seven seas
To end their days in such homes as these;
And the tales they spun for my youthful ear
I have waited a lifetime their like to hear.
But they sleep where the mournful willows bend
O'er that silent city where voyages end;
Though their memory lingers in many a page
Of log books crumbling with salt and age,
And many a rare old curio -
O where is the Cape that I used to know?

But time flows on like the ceaseless tide
And cabins clutter the country side
Like nesting gulls. Where the horse, hock deep,
Once plodded the sands the autos sweep
Before my eyes in a dizzy blur
Of mad confusion and noise and stir.
For peace and quiet have never a place
In this modern world with its feverish pace

With its movie glare and its radio -
O where is the Cape that I used to know?

REVERY

Sweet angel of the backward look
And trailing wings,
We wander by Time's restless brook
Of transient things
That from some far off, unseen nook
Forever springs.

Old Time may lay aside his glass
For just a day,
Let not the jewelled moments pass
But bid them stay,
The while we stretch upon the grass
In reverie.



THE OLD HULK

Moored to the decaying piling
Of a ruined wharf, and whiling
Endless hours away in dreams of days gone by,
Lies a battered hulk, dismasted,
Broken backed and tempest blasted,
Like a dolphin fast aground and left to die.

Deck awash and planking slanted
Like a broken lily planted
In the mud, where every tide the eddies swirl,
Years have gone since last it floated
And the sea growths all unnoted,
Underneath its rotting timbers twine and curl.

Often when my footsteps tended
To that lonely shore that ended
All its voyagings there sounded in my ear,
What the shrilling sea birds uttered
And the voiceless current muttered
Solemn messages it meant for me to hear;

"Far off seas no more beguile me
"But their memories reconcile me
"To the shelter of this silver mirrored cove
"Where my outline seems engraven
"Like an etching. Safe in haven
"I am home at last, and nevermore shall rove."

THE MODERNISTS

Bam, wham!
Clangor of cymbals and shriek of a fife,
That stabs like a knife.
Zam, slam!
Bang on the tambourine, beat on the drums,
Symphony comes!
Greet her with tom-toms while savages dance,
Let any discord the riot enhance,
Down with all melody, harmony, poise,
Give us more noise!
Tonal inebriates, drunken with sound,
Pound, brothers, pound!
Furiously, frenziedly, round and around
Whirls the mad medley of ear splitting notes,
Like the yelling of demons with flame blackened throats.

Music is stricken, is dying, 'tis said,
Over her head,
Set all the boiler works off on a spree!
Jazz and more jazz in a mad jamboree,
Music is dead!

But still in the morning the song sparrow sings
And blithely she wings,
And from her gay throat a sweet melody springs,
Old as the Pyramids, new as the dawn,
Music will live when this madness has gone.

Blah, blurb!
Pronoun and verb.
For poetry give us a barbaric yawp
Slop, Stop!
The stuff that some long haired Bohemian raves
Would make Keats and Tennyson turn in their graves
Miscalled free verse,
And trash that is worse.
Nothing too banal or trite or absurd,
Such is the artistic triumph preferred,
To melodies sung
When old Homer was young.
Out with the rhyming brook, limpid and pure,
Open a sewer!

THE MODERNISTS

Let the nymph Poesy cover her face,
Downcast and blushing at such a disgrace.
Garbage of words and cesspool of thought
Columns and pages of rubbish and rot,
Only a blot!

This is not Poesy spawned in the mire,
High on Olympus she still sounds her lyre
With the immortals. Her rapt, vibrant fire
Blasts like a flame
All the abortions brought forth in her name.

Smear, daub!
Plaster on canvas an unsightly gob
Yellow and scarlet and purple and pink,
Looks like a mess that has spilled in the sink.
But call it a sunset o'er Harlem, in truth
Or a beautiful woman enamoured with youth.
Just a name, any name that you think of will do,
And if you insert a poor outline or two,
Be sure that you violate all the known rules.
The masters were fools!
For painting is only a sleep walker's trance.
Walpurgis is with us so on with the dance!
For the forms that great Phidias carved out of stone
Misshapen monstrosities, muscle and bone
Now simper and leer,
At vapid admirers who openly jeer
At beauty of tinting or outline or form
And foment a storm,
Of sickly approval at each newest fright
That clutters our galleries, angers our sight.
For art is a blight!

O that some genius great hearted and sane
Would banish such trash of a disordered brain!
For beauty will ever be noble and fine
And speaking through music or color or line
Her voice is divine!

WHEN THE LOCUSTS ARE IN BLOOM

When the locusts are in bloom
Every bud - a riven tomb
Yields a spirit form, emerging pure as snow,
Dancing lightly on the breeze
Like the foam on fairy seas,
Swinging like enchanted censers to and fro.

And the moonbeams, white and chaste,
Through the branches interlaced,
How they seem to drip into each ivory cup,
Where anon, the summer heats
Mingle all those honeyed sweets
That the bee, with nectar drunken, loves to sup.

Wondrous pendants set with gems
Clinging to the swaying stems
How each chalice overflows into the stream
Of the scented hours that glide
Down a timeless, golden tide
To the islands where the lotus eaters dream.

So we idly float along
On the bluebird's lilting song
To a region where the blossoms never die.
For through all the cloying hours
In the thralldom of the flowers
Fancy roams in far off cloudlands of the sky.

THE HARVEST OF THE SEA

It is harvest time in the teeming sea
And the surges labor tirelessly
Like toil bent reapers with sickles of foam
They garner the harvest and carry it home,
Till the beaches throb to the rhythmic beat
As they strew it in windrows at our feet.

Slender strands like a whip lash, tear
At the cowering sands - 'tis the Dead-Man's Hair
And the rockweed bulges with bulbous lumps
All yellow and brown, with the jagged stumps
Of kelp stalks wrenched by the undertow
From sunken glens where the sea things grow.

Eel grass rolled by the waves at play
In fresh cut swaths like the new mown hay;
Lettuce that glints with a fragile sheen:
And Irish moss with its mottled green
And cream and purple and pink and brown
From the matted gulfs where sailors drown!

Algae dyed like a fresh blown rose
Red is their telltale hue that glows
On the white sands edging the brooding sea.
A network of delicate imagery
Like the thin fine lines of an etching traced
That the blundering surges have not erased.

Harvest from tide tilled fields that bloom
Deep down where the sunlight fades in gloom.
Gardens of sinister mystery
Under the waves of the heaving sea.
Gardens the living may never know
Where dead men drift in the ebb and flow!

Jungles where fishes and creatures strange
Through the lush profusion may freely range.
Not for the living but for the dead
Are those fields submerged that we may not tread,
But their harvest is scattered within our reach
By the wild waves mourning along the beach.

BEACH GRASS

Tremulous as elfin lances
Are the thin shafts of the beach grass,
Blades and tufted points that quiver
Eerily to winds of midnight;
Magic strings on lyres enchanted,
Strings that strum a lilting cadence
Played upon by fairy fingers.

Beach grass blades that whirl and struggle
In the clutch of boisterous breezes.
Needle tips that mark strange circles
In the cowering sands beneath them,
Tracings of a fairy stylus,
Runic etchings vague and ghostlike.

Tenuous roots, like bamboo jointed
Delving, burrowing neath the surface
Of the rough hewn sand dunes moulded
By great Nature's groping fingers;
(Waves and tempests are her fingers)
With their living network binding
Crumbling sands that melt and vanish -
In a woven web of fibre.
Threading with tenacious purpose
Mantles lovely and protective,
Till the battered landscape brightens
Smiles through scars and cruel gashes
Smiles in glossy, rippling beach grass
Undulating in the breezes
Like a field of ripened barley.

Beach grass, desperate, clinging, gripping
Braving wrath of winter tempests,
Scourged by sands that sting like nettles,
Blinding clouds that lash and smother,
Wet with driven spume and frosted,
With the salt and oft half buried,
As the tortured dunes roll landward,
Uncouth monsters, struggling, straining
By the rage of Neptune driven
Stumbling, sprawling, lurching onward.

BEACH GRASS

But the beach grass, fragile, yielding
Like a seine whose mesh entangles,
Binds their heaving bulks together -
In a fibrous web of rootlets;
Gripping fiercely for each foothold
Yielding grudgingly and battling
Till the storm winds howl in fury,
And the baffled ocean smothers
Futile wrath in foam and roaring,
Till the lowly beach grass triumphs;
Holds in magic chains the forces
Of ungovernable chaos.

Beach grass drawing life and nurture
From the sterile sands, a living
Energy from out the desert.
Hardy warrior, silent tamer
Of primeval urgings rampant,
Barrier to the clamorous ocean,
Staunch preserver of the landscape,
Not content with curbing surges
Or restraining restless sand dunes,
How you bless that sterile desert
With your wild and pensive beauty;
Cover o'er its savage harshness
With the mantle of your verdure
Till your patient, steadfast purpose
Glorifies the vanquished sea shore.

THE SWAMP HERON

"Quawk", comes that harshly guttural note
In the night stillness, hear it? "Quawk".
A hoarse "good hunting" from the throat
Of a night heron, feathered gawk,
Ungainly, droll, the awkward child
And threadbare outcast of the wild.

'Tis not his custom to intrude
Where others are, while on his way
To his beloved solitude
Nor has he overmuch to say;
His only greeting is a squawk
But filled with cheer, a friendly "Quawk".

Thanks, humble neighbor of the moors
For such philosophy is rare;
Though neither grace nor charm are yours
You envy no one, nor compare
Their lissome poise - your stilt like walk!
Their lilting song - your throaty "Quawk".

He knows, illfavored bird of night
The finest feathers in the dark
Are little worth, nor pleasing flight
Nor beauty's form with none to mark;
Contented but to nightly stalk
His supper like a wise old quawk.

THE THROES OF CREATION

Crash and a smother of foam
Drowned in a booming roar!
That is the way the surge comes home
Pounding along the shore.

Hiss and a seething tongue
Laps at the crumbling sand!
That is the way the sea has wrung
Room from the grudging land.

Rasp of the undertow
As its white tongue flays the beach,
Flensing the pebbles to and fro
Into its treacherous reach.

Ever the sob and moan
Of the tortured ledges rings
Grinding to dust and welding to stone
Ever the hammer swings.

Never a solid ground
Nor a fixed and steadfast place;
Shoals new risen and islands drowned
Sculpture the landscape's face.

Thus were the corners laid
For the continents and the seas;
That is the way the world was made
Out of such conflicts as these.

Up from the ocean's bed;
Into the ocean cast
Surging through infinite ages ahead
Out of an infinite past.



The Methodist Meeting House at South Truro was known to many old timers as Hog's Back Church. The following verses were written while it was still standing, though long deserted and neglected. But to those who knew and admired it, as I did, it deserves something more than the simple granite slab that marks its site. For it remains a lasting memory of a former era on old Cape Cod.

HOG'S BACK CHURCH

Foursquare it stands!
A stalwart witness year by year
To courage steadfast but austere.
The toilworn hands
That shaped its beams and laid its floors
Are folded now. The toilers lie
In marble dotted rows nearby
Though some found graves on distant shores
And some were lost at sea!
This fickle, carefree world might heed
Those iron men of Pilgrim breed,
Though rude their lives and stern their bent
They built a daring monument
To strict integrity.

Foursquare it stands!
And gazes out o'er Pamet Bay
Once whitened by the sails that lay
Where now are choking sands.
The weathered houses prim and square
That marked the hillsides everywhere
Have disappeared,
But that old church in stately pride
Still dominates the countryside;
Is still revered.

Foursquare it stands!
The dust upon the pulpit lies
Whence lurid texts and prophecies
Were hurled like burning brands.
No more the silent walls are stirred
By thunders of Jehovah's wrath
That seekers for the "Narrow Path"
Once, trembling, heard;
They revered an awful Name
And glimpsed the pit of quenchless flame
In God's own word.

Foursquare it stands on hallowed ground
And from its lonely windswept height
A landmark like a beacon light
Its spire is seen for leagues around.
Though times may change, and changing creeds

HOG'S BACK CHURCH

Are modified to modern needs
Still staunch and true,
Memorial of a former age
It keeps the priceless heritage
From olden time to new.

The plaster from the ceiling falls
On creaking floors, and in the dead
Of night there sounds the ghostly tread
Of phantom footsteps. But the walls
Still battle with the winter gale
That roars about the ancient spire,
Nor all its torrents can avail
To drown that spark of living fire -
The spirit of that temple set
On crowning heights, lest men forget!

Foursquare it stands!
The bell, long silent, seems to ring
And to the world its message fling;
"I yield alone to God's commands.
"Though all about may change, not I.
"True to my settled destiny
"I still remain.
"Though constancy be but a wraith
"Steadfastly I have kept the faith
"And shall maintain
"That faith, unfaltering, down the years
"Through all the shoals of doubts and fears,
"A lighthouse on that shoreless sea
"That broadens to Eternity".

There, like the Sphinx the old church broods
Among its deepening solitudes.
In simple grandeur let it stand
For years unborn, to bless the land,
And when its timeworn tower has gone
Still may its memory linger on.

*Struck by lightning in a thunder storm
on the night of March 21, 1940 and
totally destroyed.*

BEYOND THE POINT

A ridge of sand dunes barricades the rim
Of the horizon like a gilded bar
To roving sight; a lonely point, the brim
Of earth against the moaning surge. Afar
My glances wander, wistfull, ill at ease
From longing to explore those far off seas.

The murmuring tide creeps up before my feet
And leaves a shell or two, a broken spray
Of strange sea growth; then to some chill retreat
In ocean's depths it slowly ebbs away.
How blithely thought can trail the screaming terns
Beyond the boundaries that the eye discerns!

On the horizon looms that point beside
The pathless main, a prison door to me;
For I would follow on that restless tide
To lands remote beyond a shoreless sea;
Through shimmering haze how like a magic wand
That dune ridged finger beckons me beyond!

The rolling hills enclose me and the sky
Bends overhead, but these are different things;
Somehow they do not seem to press so nigh
As that wind fretted wall of sand that rings
My little world about, and intervenes
To shut my vision from enchanted scenes.

And though in happier days I sailed those seas
Around the globe upon the buoyant trades
To Ceylon, Singapore and Celebes,
Beheld their fanes and trod their tropic glades
Those voyages leave me still unsatisfied
In this lone cottage where I now abide.

Beyond the point what vistas of romance
Of golden kingdoms still their wealth unfold;
Though fettered by the bonds of circumstance
My failing vision and my limbs grown old
Among the embers of my memories
One lingering flame, adventure, never dies.

THE WINDS OF TIME

O the winds of time sweep the lonely years
Like withered leaves down the path of night,
And their notes, like a dirge, sound in our ears
As our eyes are strained for a glimpse of light.
And our sad heart utters a voiceless prayer -
 Whence do ye come - ye bitter winds,
 Where do ye go - O where?

Through the swarming suns where the Zodiac's blaze
Fades out in the awful deeps of space,
As you hurry us on your unknown ways,
Shall our feet leave never a trace?
Rushed from the light to the silent dark,
 Tell us, tell us, O mocking winds -
 Is there a voice - O hark!

And the wondrous things we planned to do
In those far off days when our hearts were young.
But the task was long and the hours were few
And the songs we dreamed of are still unsung.
Will our hopes fade out when the light is gone?
 Whisper, whisper, O pitiless winds,
 Is there another dawn?

Where are the friends that we used to know?
Like the fallen leaves gone one by one.
And the scenes that we loved in the long ago
Faint shadows still in the setting sun.
They have gone - we go - for the wild winds rave -
 "The path that ye tread in silent dread
 Leads on to an open grave!"

But those voices hushed, they linger yet
Like the haunting chords of a lost refrain.
And those scenes we can see with a sweet regret
Though their outlines are blurred they still remain
Shall they live - those things - in our groping brain,
 Like the ocean's surge in an empty shell
 Nor live elsewhere again?

TO AN AGED WILLOW

Ancient willow, drooping low
Gnarled old trunk and withered bough,
Though they say you're dying now
I can never have it so.

Massive limbs against the sky
Wrestling with the winds of heaven,
E'en the thunder crashing levin
Like old Ajax you defy.

Where your mournful branches bend
Countless birds their nests have made
Woodland songsters unafraid.
You, old willow, were their friend.

And you sheltered me as well,
Often in the summer's heat
Idly musing at your feet
I have felt your soothing spell.

Rustling softly through the leaves
Pendulous to every air,
Peace and solace everywhere
Dripped like raindrops from the eaves.

And the white clouds floating by
Bore me to the shores of dreams -
Blissful yet the memory seems -
Loved companion, must you die?

No cathedral's gloomy nave
Or cold monument for me,
Rather let me have a tree
As a marker for my grave.

And the Land of Yet-to-Be
Where sun risen glories play,
May it see you clothed some day
In immortal greenery.



THE OLD WOOD'S ROAD

It blunders off through ways obscure
The old wood's road I used to tread,
Until its columned walls immure
The sunbeams dripping overhead.

Through scented gloom it seems to wind
O'er fallen branches mossy green,
And leaving all the world behind
Gropes blindly toward a world unseen.

The ancient wheel ruts disappear
With pine and scrub oak overgrown,
No creaking wain for many a year
Has trailed its coverts wild and lone.

"I wonder where that old road goes?"
I hear some blithe young voices say
And I might tell them if I chose
"Back to the land of yesterday."

THE POVERTY WEED

O the poverty weed is so shabby and poor
That she seems to disfigure the land,
The russet clad waif of the desolate moor
She buries her face in the sand.

Her threadbare old mantle all faded and frayed
What beauty can ever adorn?
As she cowers in the background this shy desert maid
So lowly, despised and forlorn.

But over that moorland in splashes of gold
Like sunbeams enriching the gloom,
What visions of loveliness seem to unfold
When the poverty weed is in bloom!

Aglow are those hillsides once barren and lone
And golden those patches of green,
When this poor floral outcast comes into her own
And the blossoms all bow to their queen.

THE SWEEP OF THE TIDES

Out of the fathomless ocean
Shaking the earth with their strides,
Chaos resurgent in motion,
Battle the foam bearded tides.
Titans stupendous, upheaving,
Flouting the roaring Monsoon,
Hoarse with the joy of achieving
Freedom to reach for the moon.

Titans whose dungeons are riven
Sped on their turbulent path,
Not by Poseidon driven
Nor by grim Eolus' wrath,
Clamorous, never delaying,
Scouring the outermost dune,
Sullen but ever obeying
That mocking enchantress - the moon.

Fundy is choked with their foaming,
Fiercely they snarl 'round the Horn,
Glinting like steel in the gloaming,
Patined with gold at morn;
White with the ice of the Behring,
Green with sargassum strewn
Wolves of the deep, never nearing,
But ever pursuing the moon.

Round and around and forever
Dizzily circling the globe;
Torn by impassioned endeavor
Clutching, to touch but her robe;
Wraithlike that robe, but enduring,
Trailing her silvery lune,
Woven of moonbeams alluring,
Tracing the path to the moon.

Formless, uncouth, terrifying,
Goading the indolent seas;
Breathing out clouds with their sighing,
Draining the deep of its lees,
Mountainous troughing and cresting,
Then calm as a coral lagoon,
Limitless yearning and questing
Madness bewitched by the moon.

THE SWEEP OF THE TIDES

Monstrous caress of the ocean
Fondling the obdurate land,
Urged by abyssmal emotion
Granite may hardly withstand,
Beats of a world olden measure
Savage but roughly in tune,
Floodtime and ebb at the pleasure
Of that horned enchantress - the moon.

Alternate plunge and upheaval
Strong as earth giants who strove
Grandly in aeons primeval
Braving omnipotent Jove;
Forces terrific, whose rages
Drown out the shrieking Typhoon
Storming through infinite ages
After a phantom - the moon!

LOST BILLINGSGATE

From Billingsgate the beacons's flash
No longer stabs the quivering dark,
But fang like breakers foam and gnash
Above its sand bars ribbed and stark.
Where whispering grasses used to grow
And nesting terns their shelter made,
Now snarls the rasping undertow
And breezes mutter - half afraid!

For it has gone like Lyonesse
Of Arthur's reign - enchanted realm
Of dreamy eyed forgetfulness
That saw the ocean overwhelm
Her shores, till e'en the towers were drowned
Where Merlin spun his evil spells,
And fishers startle - when the sound
Wells upward as from sunken bells!

Yes, Billingsgate is lost to view
Beneath the all engulfing sea,
The lonely Isle the Pilgrims knew -
But still it lives in memory.
And sometimes in the dead of night
We hear the shoal bemoan its fate
Clothed in a shroud of breakers white -
The ghost of vanished Billingsgate!

TRANSFORMED

A battered thing it seems
That salt encrusted drift wood, but the skies
Showed never rainbow with more gorgeous dyes
Than gild that firelight's beams.

The cloud banks dull and grey
Far in the west, are but a canvas spread
For supernatural scenes in gold and red
When ends the dying day.

The icy Frost King lays
His finger on the leaves and lo, the fires
Of fairy land on autumn's funeral pyres
Seem everywhere ablaze.

And so each inner trace
Of life's deep grief and cankered bitterness
Is graven in those lines of kindness
Upon an aged face.

HAUNTING ECHOES

The music dies upon the strings
But lingers on
Like other sweetly treasured things
Here once - and gone.

The breeze that blurs the mirror pool
Cannot erase
The outline of the forest cool
Upon its face.

The haunting fragrance of the flowers
Of yesterday
Not all the intervening hours
Can steal away.

And loving friends we used to know
Nor e'er forget
Although they left us long ago
Seem with us yet.

LOST AT SEA

Through bushes half obscured, a marble slab
Peers out like a pale face. Inscribed upon
Its weathered surface that the lichen growth
And winter's storms have blurred, a few brief words
The curious eye may spell with labored care.
To "H" and "M" - perhaps - and the terse phrase
So haunting in its stark simplicity
And pathos, - "Lost at sea." The changeless gulfs
Of ocean knew the dead man mentioned here
Where bushes riot o'er an empty grave,
But what old friend remembers him today?
Ofttimes, no doubt, upon the wet sea sand
He traced his name in childhood, while the waves
Erased the halting script. Another hand
Has etched that name in form more durable;
But year by year, the ceaseless ebb and flow
Of time's remorseless tides obliterate
The letters shrunken to initials faint,
And that last solemn statement - "Lost at sea".
Much has been written on the vanity
Of human life, but never penned more tense
With meaning than this lonely epitaph
Set in a thicket on a crumbling stone.

THE ASPEN

Lonely aspen rising high
Straight and true you greet the eye.
Bent by every passing breeze
Weakest, slenderest of trees;
Yet what grace, what stateliness
Every leaf and twig express!

Brittle limbs of little worth,
How from out thy meager girth
May we fashion wood for use?
What may be the frail excuse
For thy lovely shaft of green
On the verge of my ravine?

But the aspen, wise and shy
Never deigned to make reply.
Swayed to every wandering air
Shed its beauty everywhere,
Till its friendly dignity
Made its message clear to me.

God designed thee, aspen slim
Who am I to question Him?
In the mighty scheme of things
You and I play minor strings
Yet your part has been well done
Mine is only half begun!



THE SONG OF THE SEA GULLS

Hark how the sea gulls are screaming with glee
Piercing as Pipes of Pan!
Keening their songs to the beach and the sea
Sung since the world began;
O'er breakers combing in jubilant strife,
Flecked with their foaming and throbbing with life,
Here they come homing - O shrill as a fife
List to their wild elan!

They are the spirits exultant and free,
Up in the clouds they belong.
Ever aspiring in skyland to be,
Theirs is the verve of the strong.
Here they go steering through canyons of air,
Onward careering, and eager to dare,
Scornful of fearing with never a care
List to the lilt of their song!

BROKEN FRAGMENTS

Only a bit of broken glass
Half concealed in the tangled grass,
But the sunbeam found a pathway through
On its arrow flight from the vault of blue
And straight through the weed grown thicket came
To touch that glass with its kindling flame.

Only a sunbeam's glinting gold
On a splintered bit that we now behold
Rich with crimson and purple sheen
Autumn yellow and vernal green
Until, transfigured, it glows arrayed
In the rainbow aura the sunbeam made.

Only an old man bent and gray
Gazing into the far-away.
Human wreckage forlorn and lone
But his face with a sudden glory shone.
Was it the sunbeam's magic wand
Or hidden splendors he glimpsed beyond?

Only a bit of shattered glass,
And a poor old man that we idly pass,
But the shard like a diamond, glittered bright
And the time worn face suffused with light,
When the gates in the jasper walls swung wide
And those broken fragments were glorified.

WORKERS OF MAGIC

Immured in the downy cocoon
A marvelous artisan spins
With threads like the beams of the moon
So gossamer fine. Have the Djinns
Who dream in the mulberry trees,
O weaver beyond compare,
Bewitched with the shimmer of orient seas
Your fabric so lustrous and fair?
Toiler imprisoned who weaves and weaves
A silken glory from naught but leaves.

To the mollusc, tormented, which holds
The irritant sand in his shell,
What radiant vision unfolds
Invoked by the mermaiden's spell?
As he fashions that shape, and imbues
It with colors he never has seen,
With opalescent and rainbow hues,
A pearl with the fairylike sheen
Of the sea. O artist whom fate condemns
To gild with beauty this queen of gems.

In his desolate attic alone
In the gloom of the midnight hour,
The poet, despondent, unknown
Is thrilled by that wizardly power
That the silk worm and pearl oyster feel
The urge to create! And his brain
Like the anvil resounding to steel
In a minstrelsy vibrant with pain,
Sends sparkles blazing through singing lines
As the verse with his burning thought combines.

MY GOLDEN FLEECE

When but a child my eyes would oft forsake
The blurring page, and through the window seek
Like an escaping bird, the wonderland
Of dreams, till my instructor, grave, enquired
"Wool gathering again?" So mid the halls
Of classic learning out into the world
Of bruise and bitterness but softening all
As summer haze dissolves the jagged peaks
And makes the deserts bloom - my fancy blithe,
Drinking the waters of eternal youth,
Has ventured many a lordly enterprise
Wool gathering down the years.

Now older grown
Calm in the tranquil gloaming of my life
I dwell apart, the while my mellow lamp
With tapestry of shadow drapes the wall
And e'en the crickets shrilling greets my ear
Like pipes of Arcady. There friends long gone
Cluster about with gladness, and scenes
From recollection gleaned or fancy limned
Expand my chamber to horizons vast
Till pensively I muse "Wool gathering still?"

Bless all kind fairies of fond Memory's brood,
Or those which grace Imaginations court,
For treasures such as these. Jason of old,
Who led his argonauts through seas of blood
Seeking the golden fleece, has set the course
For dreamers through all ages yet to come.

O Hero legended, thine be the goal
My yearning eyes would glimpse. What cloudland slopes
Feed those immortal sheep whose fleeces bright
Are woven into dreams are ever hid
Beyond my ken. But the great quest is mine
To glorify the drabness of the years
Life's sterile day by day.

One need not gain
The fabled hoard that marks the rainbow's end
To feel, beholding that resplendent arch
A link with faery land. Wool gathering - yes
But rather say the guerdon wisdom brings,
The magic touch that gilds the commonplace
With beauty and delight, the lustrous threads
In life's rough fabric drawn from fleece of gold.

THE LONE LILAC

Only a cellar broken
Down to a dimpled mound,
Of the olden time a token
In the brier entangled ground.

And a lonely lilac vagrant
As a sunbeam lost in gloom,
Close by like a garland fragrant
At the door of a crumbling tomb.

Full many a tree appearing
Has ploughed through the sodden loam
Where once was a fertile clearing
Protecting a friendly home.

And sweet as the perfume welling
From the lilac over the way,
Was life in that quaint old dwelling
In that long forgotten day.

Under the caves, enfolded
It mothered its little brood;
But the sills long since have molded
To dust in that solitude.

Now through the locusts treading
(A grove from a single one)
Like the virile banyan spreading
Neath the burning Indian sun.

We can vision those fields in culture;
And the beds once bright with flowers,
Where a crow now sits like a vulture,
And broods through the sunlit hours.

While stark through the verdure risen
Like the tides in the distant bay,
Through a cleft in its leafy prison
Peers the lilac over the way.

Anon as the breezes bluster,
Then die and are strangely mute,
The echoing memories cluster
Like strains from a far off lute.

We can almost hear the fingers
Strumming an elfin lay -
For the soul of that home still lingers
In the lilac over the way.

FRIENDLY LIGHTS

Welcome greetings through the dark
From the lamp light burning clear
In some lonely home, a spark
Radiating warmth and cheer.

Lighthouse darting from the lea
Flaming lances o'er the foam,
Wandering mariners at sea
You are guiding safely home.

Glow worm on a summer night
Torch within an elfin hand,
Marking by your zig zag flight
Ways obscure to fairy land.

Starry twinkle in the blue
To illumine worlds on high
Far off orb we share with you
Friendliness of earth and sky.

TO MY CHERRY BLOSSOM

From old Japan beyond the sea
A fairy vision beckons me,
A vale where cool the shadows rest
From Fujiyama's towering crest,
A ruined temple's crumbling wall
Lulled by a drowsy waterfall,
A shrine in whose corroding bell
Faint murmurs, long forgotten, dwell,
And Buddha, brooding day by day
Dreams the slow centuries away
In old Japan.

There might the careworn find release
In calm Nirvana's perfect peace.
There might the traveler inhale
The haunting sweetness of that vale,
An incense from the flowery gloom
Where clustering cherry blossoms bloom
In petaled purity that glows
Like Fujiyama's drifting snows;
The fragrance of a far off clime
From some remote, forgotten time
In old Japan.

There might I roam in fancy free
That Orient vale beyond the sea,
By Nippon's shores an Eden seek
Neath Fujiyama's storied peak.
But here, - where happier far, I'd be
A CHERRY BLOSSOM blooms for me.
I glimpse within her starry eyes
A nearer view of Paradise,
My Shrine and Eden is our home,
Nor need my wandering fancy roam
To old Japan.

GRAINS OF SAND

Fine gleanings of the ledges, golden grains
That ponderous glaciers reaped long, long ago
From battlemented crags and furrowed plains
Grinding and crushing with resistless flow,
To mingle with the melting seas, and heap
Their flinty harvestings in windrows; strew
The granite kernels for the thunderous deep
To winnow endlessly and grind anew.

Where are those lordly peaks that once defied
The fury of the gales, nor deigned to bow
To heaven's own lightning? How the scornful tide
Washes about and putters with them now;
Yes, even my weak fingers have the power
To fashion as I will or idly thrust
Into a glass to mark the fleeting hour,
These grains of sand - some crumbled mountain's dust

THE FUNERAL WREATH

There is a cottage trim and neat,
Who dwelt within I cannot say,
It seemed so homey a retreat,
My steps have often led that way.
But now a wreath is hung before
Its silent door.

A funeral wreath of sombre tone
Where Death has shed a ray of gloom;
And someone mourns for someone gone
Within a vacant darkened room.
So eloquent of human grief
Is every leaf!

Such is the laurel crown that waits
Our journey's end through toil and tears;
The emblem grim that decorates
Your door and mine, e'er many years
So that some idle passer by
May wonder why!

MEMORY

She crouches in the caves of thought
Enchantress, brooding o'er the fire,
And those her mystic charms have sought
Shall sometime gain their heart's desire.
With mumblings and averted gaze
She weaves her spells, while to and fro
Like shadows from the mounting blaze,
Upon the walls there come and go
The scenes of far off happier days
Faint visions of the long ago.

The eastern tyrant steals in dead of night
Down rock hewn stairs and through an iron door;
And feasts his eyes by flaring torch's light
Upon the wealth heaped on his treasury floor;
On bursting sacks of coin, caskets of gems
Scepters of ruby, diamond diadems,
A kingdom's plunder. We, like him, have stored
Our hidden wealth, and memory keeps the key,
No jewels lustreless, are in our hoard
But trophies of a richer dynasty,
The sweet experiences that time endears
Sifted and winnowed gleanings of the years

With halting steps and labored breath we climb
The attic stairs and rummage sadly through
The toys and trifling things our childhood knew,
Until our brooding thoughts are lost to time,
And like the dust motes dancing in the beams
Come thronging memories through a mist of dreams.

Forth from an aged tome there falls a flower
Faded and crumbling, yet its petals glow,
Once more in the sweet memory of that hour
When loving fingers gave it long ago.

As through the spectral city of the dead
With downcast eyes and reverential tread
We note the broken columns and the urns
In marble draped, and e'er our gaze returns
To our own name graved on the granite bare
The death date blank - yet it will soon be there!

Then Memory leads us with a sad, sweet smile
Among those grass grown mounds. On many a stone
Are names of those we loved - A little while

MEMORY

And we shall be with them among our own.
We seem to hear their welcoming voices ring;
A whisper comes - "O death where is thy sting?"

Alone we came into this world - alone
We venture forth. And recollections fond
Are all that we may bear to the beyond
To lay, some day, before a great white throne!

Our life has been a path forlorn that winds
Forever on through gnarled and twisted years
Of forest gloom. A path that memory finds
And helps us trace it backward through our tears.

Upon a beechen trunk, deep in the bark
Two carven hearts by single arrow cleft:
How many years since youth, with ardent hand
Inscribed them there. Two hearts and one bereft!

In the long autumn afternoons we go
By russet moors and watch the slanting rays
Bathe all the landscape with a golden haze
That melts its harsher outlines. Thus the flow
Of years has smoothed away each grief and pain
Of childhood and life's later bitterness,
While Memory, with a witching tenderness,
Has glorified the things that still remain.

In pensive revery our fancy turns
Out to the west where the red sunset burns,
Fain would we ponder when our sun may set
And yield to the sad sweetness of regret,
But Memory thrills with wild ecstasies
Before that miracle of blazing skies.

In awe we gaze as lengthening shadows loom
And night peers forth. But Memory hovers near
We clutch her fingers in the deepening gloom
And trembling hang upon her words of cheer,
Till with a hopeful glance she points afar
Where, like a gem on velvet, gleams a star!

We stand aghast beneath the vaulted dome
Aglitter with creation's rhapsodies
The countless stars. And let our fancy roam

MEMORY

Through space unfathomed, past the Pleiades
Out to the deeps beyond. Until the veil
That shuts us from the past seems strangely stirred
And recollections vague - beyond the pale -
Flit through our brain, half thoughts confused and blurred.
A former life upon some sunnier sphere!
Things long forgot and dimly sensed again
Far off, for one rapt moment hover near.
We strive to clutch them, but we strive in vain.
Does Memory mock us, or in fear perchance

Shield us from some grim Terror's Gorgon glance
That glares unseen, from out the dark! Farflung
A wisp of cloud darts like a dragon's tongue
And laps Orion's belt. At glowing dawn
The constellations fade - the veil is drawn!

The blood stained trail of history winds away
Through ruined cities and past crumbling walls
Half buried, where the tottering columns sway
To winds that blunder through the vacant halls.
Beyond lie relics of remoter time
Dolmens and cromlechs, monoliths of stone
Inscriptions weird and uncouth monsters carved
On cavern walls, and bits of splintered bone
Traced when the hairy mammoth ranged among
Wild fens and woodlands when the world was young.

For all the runes inscribed on History's page
As Time's slow finger etched them age by age
For our dim eyes to see,
Are but the priceless, deathless heritage
Of Memory.

The traveler venturing into deserts grim
That shimmer on the hot horizon's rim,
Does battle with the demons of the heat
While sands like burning fingers, claw his feet
But other wayfarers have braved the wrath
Of scorching wastes - their bones still mark the path!

Our counsellor and guide, calm Memory holds
The golden balances whose scale unfolds
The wisdom of the tried - experience true.
The balance trembles. what ought we to do?

MEMORY

It dips, it falls, the standard points the way
Today's decisions rest on yesterday.

Upon the shores of Time's vast sea we stand
And peer into the gathering mists that rise
Dark and portentous before our eyes,
While through our fingers slip the grains of sand.
We know the waves advancing, will not stay
But wash our stumbling footprints all away.

Into that sea have sailed the winged hours
Like argosies by youthful fancy sent
On joyous quest to some far Orient
Created in our dreams, pagoda'd towers
To bold adventure beckoning gaily on,
While tropic skies lent their romantic lure.
But those exotic hours, alas, have gone
And broken memories alone endure.

O time may rob us of our dearest friends.
But not our memories! The present blends
Into the vanished vistas of the past.
Riches have taken wings but at the last
A pittance left us. Old, we yet may drink
From youth's eternal fount. A golden link
Still binds us with the loved we see no more.
The lamp lit circle on our chamber floor
Our little kingdom bounds. Within its space
Our eyes, through Memory's magic, see a face
That shed, long years ago, a radiance there,
A form adorned that graced a vacant chair.
How rich and full was life, how barren now!
Forsaken in our poverty we bow
To Fate's decree. But in despairing mood
Kind Memory, pitying, shares our solitude.

Are memories but the vain desire
For happier hours that once were mine?
The embers of a dying fire.
The dwindled lees of life's rich wine?
Or echoes from a seraph's lyre
But lightly touched by hands divine?

THE STOKER

While a student at college, I voyaged to Naples in the steerage of an Italian liner. That was long before the days of the modern oil burner and the engine room was a fair reproduction of Dante's Inferno. One afternoon a young stoker, begrimed and perspiring, crept up the iron ladder from the stoke hold and sat for a few minutes gazing out of an open port. His wistful face remains a vivid memory and occasioned the following lines

Framed in the iron port there looms a face
That Rembrandt's stilus or the sombre muse
Of Dante might have etched. Pale cheeks and eyes
That gaze unseeing, out - a forehead damp
With sweat and smeared with grime - a haunting face
Through which there peers in wistful apathy
A parched and withered soul. Some stoker crept,
Gasping for air up from that hell below,
Of lurid fires and gloom, where engines groan
Like blinded Titans, and with giant strength
Shoulder the huge hulk forward through the brine.

What thoughts beguile the furrows of that brow
Does he perchance, recall the sunlit days
Of childhood in some cottage gay with flowers
Where Italy, enthroned among her rocks
Broods o'er her vanished grandeur? Does the spell
Of romance conjure up the golden past
When his proud forbears bore the pomp of Rome
To seas remote, when Roman legions ruled
The servile world? Did he in flaunting crest,
And burnished armour tread the galley deck?
Or did a scourging destiny condemn
His pain wracked shoulders to the oaken oar?

To his dulled ears float strains of music sweet
From gilded cabins where the zest of life
Enthralls the voyagers, while his the hand
That drives the moving palace on her course
Through seas of shimmering light. A gnome begrimed,
Breathing foul dust and blistered by the heat
In caverns far below. A galley slave
Heaving and straining at a deadlier oar -
An iron bar that burns the calloused palm.

THE STOKER

Whene'er the furnace gapes its dragon jaws
And blasts him with its breath, with reckless hand
He flings his youth into that Moloch's maw!
And his reward? O bargain infamous
A mess of pottage for a birth right riven
Like Esau's ancient sin. Repulsive fare
A stinking hole to kennel like a cur
Battling with vermin, foul and desperate
Too bitter punishment for branded crime.

Chained by the manacles of circumstance
To Vulcan's smoking forge, a fate more dire
Than once befell Prometheus wracked upon
His cross of crags on grizzled Caucasus;
With every shovel speed the winged hours
His hopes, his dreams, his life but sordid lumps
Of coal to feed those flames insatiate.
Then Death, the pitiful, brings welcome rest.
His body, warped and shrivelled, slides adown
The tilted hatchway, weighted at the feet
A burned out clinker cast into the sea!

IMAGINATION

Blest Being from some happier sphere
O bend thy luminous footsteps near
Were Heaven's gates ajar,
When down a moonlit path you came
With dazzling smile and wings of flame
Fair as the morning star?

Imagination, radiant sprite
With crescent crown and stars bedight,
And seraph's eyes;
O guide us up that filmy stair
By ladders raised on buoyant air
To vaulting skies!

Imagination is the singing rhyme
In life's dull prose.
She blooms among the cruel thorns of time
A beauteous rose.
No Circe's spell is hers, the poppy's lure
From present pain
In drug engendered dreams; but calm and pure
Is her sweet reign.
Her finger traces in the storm cloud gray
The rainbow's arc;
She sees within the gnarled volcanic clay
The diamond's spark;
Forecasts the harvests in the sodded rows
The plough shares fling;
When all the world is buried neath the snows
She dreams of spring.
The cave man followed up the savage road
The torch she bore,
She marks within life's rock encumbered lode
The glinting ore.
Imagination melts in purple mist
The jagged peaks;
And petty things yield to this alchemist
The gold she seeks.
No priestess of illusions, vague, unreal
And not of earth,
She rather helps us know and see and feel
A thing's true worth.

IMAGINATION

Along the wistful trail of yesterdays
Backward sad Memory directs her gaze
And points her withered hand.
"Tomorrow" is the magic word that cheers
Imagination onward through the years
Where lies her promised land.

Imagination only can explain
Those jewelled etchings on our window pane
By fairies of the frost;
From icy peaks and breaker fretted seas
To elven glens beneath snow laden trees
So cunningly embossed.

Calm reason tells us there is nothing there
But mists congealing in the frosted air;
'Tis false, calm reason lies.
For in that witching square the eye beholds
A glittering world of wonder that unfolds
Its luminous mysteries.

Imagination plumbs the deeps of space
To roam among the stars,
She gilds the workshop, lights the market place,
And sunders prison bars.
Her inspiration made Da Vinci thrill
And o'er his canvas shone,
And Michelangelo's god like visions still
Endure in living stone.

Beyond the sunset's molten lava flood
Lie mysteries yet untold -
Imagination sails those seas of blood
And mounts those walls of gold.
Her finger laid on blind old Milton's eyes
Kindled no earthly glow -
And deaf Beethoven thrilled to melodies
No mortal ear may know.

IMAGINATION

Imagination decks the naked tree
With candles burning clear,
Until transfigured by her witchery
It blooms with Christmas cheer.
Life's pathway leads us to the yawning tomb
And there it seems to end -
Imagination peering through the gloom
Sees visions that transcend.

Imagination marked the goal
That fired Columbus' burning soul,
Till like a vision through the haze
A new world burst upon his gaze
That voyage of destiny.

And ancient chroniclers relate
Magellan, groping through the strait,
Beyond the blue horizon's rim
Saw far off islands beckon him
Out to an unknown sea!

"Imagination rules the world" so said
The great Napoleon, and at the head
Of conquering armies drove his ruthless way
Made Afric sands and Russian snows obey
His iron decrees: Upon an Alpine height
Poised like an eagle, terrible as night,
He swooped on Italy. His boundless reign
Was the creation of his lonely brain.

On upstart thrones he set his underlings.
Like puppets played with kingdoms and with kings -
His fingers marked their bounds, his will their power
Earth's dictator, in that tremendous hour
He dreamed like Lucifer, as grandly wove
His dreams into reality, then strove
For Godlike heights, and from those heights was hurled
And in his meteor fall amazed the world!

IMAGINATION

The naked truth itself is never true.
Stern facts are but the skeleton that binds
Our living fancies. If we seek to view
Truth absolute, her grisly horror blinds
Our eyes, for her's is but the mocking skull,
Stark, hideous, the poor grain's withered hull
After the kernel dies. The glance, the smile,
Expression, character, the soul beguile
When, taking form o'er Truth's repellent base
Imagination beams with radiant face.

Imagination is the martial strain
That fires disheartened soldiers for the fray;
Her pitying fingers smooth the brow of pain,
She whispers low, - "This too, shall pass away."
Her's is the vision, the all seeing eye
That pierces where truth's nuggets lie concealed.
Illusions crumble at her query, "Why?"
The Sphinx's ancient wisdom is revealed
To her clear sight. She holds the golden key
That can unlock the guarded door of fate.
She is the lodestar of our destiny,
Her's is the Godlike impulse to create.
The treasure that Prometheus once stole
From Heaven's high altar is her sacred fire;
To the insensate clod she is the soul,
The Phoenix risen from the funeral pyre!

The atoms spin, the elements adhere
Till matter forms like mold: and vaunted life
A fungus growth upon a dying sphere
Whirls on into the dark. "The futile strife
"Of some vast mechanism's grinding gears." -
Grim science tells us - but the vision comes
Of life immortal ranging down the years
Through endless vistas of milleniums!

IN WELLFLEET BY THE SEA

"Why do you dwell in Wellfleet by the sea?"
Inquires some wondering friend,
"Is this quaint village in the dunes the end
To life's bright trail, the world that you have known
Shut out behind you? From a weed draped stone
"A barnacle might thus survey the sky,
"As the grand pageant of mankind sweeps by."

To this I answer, "Not this quiet place
But vaster regions are his home as well
Who humbly seeks where the immortals dwell,
Those kingly souls of every clime and race.
The seven branching candlestick ablaze
With wisdom's radiant light
Brightens his studious library at night
And sheds its all illuminating rays
Across the lengthening years,
Till loving presences sages and seers,
Are his true friends. Must he alone abide
With Socrates or Shakespeare as his guide?

Art's priceless treasures stored in Greece or Rome
The mighty masters limned
By the slow lapse of centuries undimmed,
Fade into nothingness beneath the dome
Whereon a mightier Artist graves His lines
And blocks His bold designs;
For He can etch with lightnings, and His dyes
Are wrung from clouds that drip with red and gold,
While silent watchers, awestruck, may behold
His wonders blazoned on the midnight skies.

One need not dwell alone beside the sea,
There are no bars
To sunder Him who walked on Galilee
Or blur the vision of the loftiest stars
No solitary being, set apart,
Is he who feels the soul sustaining calm
Steal o'er his spirit like a healing balm
From Mother Nature's all embracing heart.

IN WELLFLEET BY THE SEA

His dreams are lulled by the resounding sea,
The rhythm of the waves that never tire,
While sweeter than the strains of Orpheus' lyre
The dying wind's melodious minstrelsy,
Ranging this narrow bourne of surf and sand,
Seems echoing from the horns of fairyland.

And when he strolls in solitude, the breeze
That breathes upon his face,
Was never curbed by this confining space,
For once it roamed the lonely Hebrides.
The murmuring tide
That swells the shallows of this pleasant bay,
Washed coral islands half a world away
And coursed through boundless oceans far and wide.

Rather he looks with sympathetic eye
As with their faces tense and shut from heaven
By scorpion whips of fear and envy driven
The jostling multitudes of men rush by;
Spurning the bounties kindly Nature gave
As though in haste for an untimely grave.

No shadows cast by avarice or pride
Darken this countryside;
That tyrant trinity, fame, wealth, and power
Have somehow lost their spell. Each passing hour
Bears costlier freight than theirs, the gifts divine -
Health, gratitude, content. Those gifts are mine
So why should reckless wastrels pity me
With all my wealth, in Wellfleet by the sea?

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